

Women in the Revolution

In any account of war, the main emphasis is usually on the actions of the generals and soldiers. Women had an important role in the Revolution. They were responsible for keeping the everyday activities of the family continuing even though their husbands and sons were off fighting in a war. The duties of the women were many. They were responsible for securing the food, for preparing and cooking it, for making the cloth and the clothes for the family, for taking care of the children and servants, for continuing the



Illustrated by Frieda Collins

planting and harvesting of crops, and for continuing to run family businesses. Many Patriot women, with strong feelings of patriotism, worked very hard to produce as much as possible for the war effort. Women began to take a keen interest in politics, even though they were not allowed to vote. Many women supported the Revolution and republican principles. These women were an essential part of the war effort.

OBJECTIVES

The student will be able to:

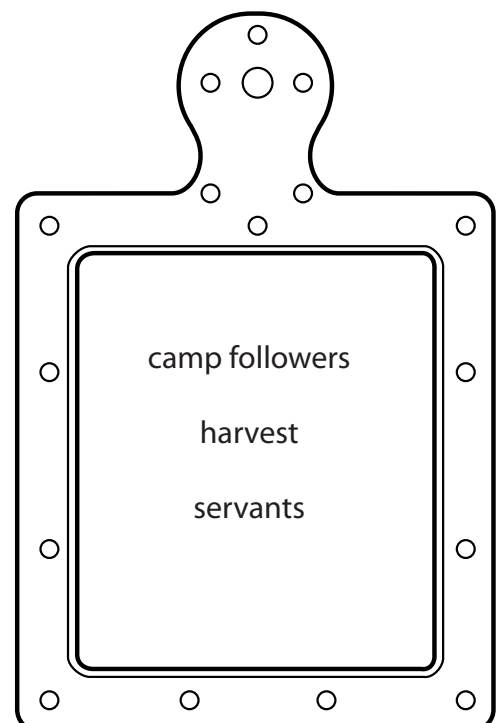
- 1) name at least two women involved in the War in South Carolina and describe their actions;
- 2) list three ways women were involved in the war effort.

Not all women stayed at home. In *“Turning the World Upside Down,”* John Tebbel discusses the role of women in camps. He says, “. . . without women the army can’t survive.” He points out that most women who were camp followers were the wives of enlisted men and low-ranking officers and that these wives did “women’s work” that the soldiers refused to do. They had to cook, launder, try to keep the camp clean, and provide medical treatment.

Those who stayed at home ran businesses and farms and made clothes and shoes for the soldiers. They also met and made bandages, quilts and blankets, and other things the soldiers needed.

Some of the women who have been remembered for their efforts in the American Revolution include:

Emily Geiger - This 18 year-old volunteered to take a message from General Nathanael Greene to General Thomas Sumter. When she was captured by the British, she ate the note before they could find it. She was then released and later delivered the message to “The Gamecock.”





Deborah Sampson disguised herself as a man in order to enlist in the war effort.

Facts on File

Dacey Langston - This 16 year-old lived in an area where there were many Tories. She carried warnings to her brothers when she overheard plans of a group called the Bloody Scouts. She refused to give information to the Tories even when she was captured and threatened with death.

Jane Thomas - An older lady who overheard a group of Tory women discussing a surprise attack the Loyalists were going to launch against the Patriots the next day at Cedar Spring, S.C. Because this was only a few miles from her home, she knew her son and other Patriot soldiers were camped there. Even though she was tired and over fifty miles from home, she rode to her son's camp. She warned the Patriot soldiers who left their campfires burning and hid in the woods. As a result, the Tories were captured.

Rebecca Brewster Motte - While the British occupied her house in Charleston, she slipped messages to the Patriots. Later, she allowed Francis Marion and his men to set fire to her plantation, Fort Motte, in order to drive out the British. The British immediately surrendered and helped put out the fire. Mrs. Motte then fixed a dinner for both sides.

Martha Bratton - The wife of Colonel William Bratton, she detained the British at Brattonsville and sent a warning to Colonel Bratton and his men that helped lead to the Battle of Huck's Defeat.

Mary Gaston McClure - Christian Huck took great pleasure in harassing the Presbyterians of the Upcountry. He especially enjoyed burning their Bibles. Mrs. McClure's son, James, and son-in-law, Edward Martin, were busy melting Mrs. McClure's pewter to make bullets. They did not see the British and were captured. Huck demanded to know where her other sons were. He then threw her Bible in the fire. When she snatched the book from the fire, he hit her with the flat of his sword. The soldiers then set fire to her house, but she put it out. When they tried to tear apart a plank partition, she managed to get out money she had hidden in the planks by pretending to fall down. When the soldiers left, she sent her daughter, Mary, 30 miles to warn General Sumter.

We know of no women who actually participated in the Battle of Kings Mountain on the Patriot side. According to an article by Helen D. Chandler in the *Gastonia Gazette*, June 14, 1930, the women of Lincoln (now Gaston) County knew that their men had joined the mountaineers who were searching for Patrick Ferguson. She says they heard the noise of the two thousand guns firing about 3 o'clock. According to letters that have been passed down, one woman unhitched the horse she was plowing with and began riding toward the noise. She was joined by some of her neighbors. They reached the battlefield late in the afternoon. They tore their underskirts and used them as bandages for the wounded. Major Ferguson and the Loyalists, on the other hand, had two camp followers, Virginia Sal and Virginia Paul. Virginia Sal, a red-haired lady, was said to have been one of the first to fall in the battle. Virginia Paul was taken prisoner and was subsequently sent to Cornwallis.

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Activities: Women in the Revolution

1

Creative Writing

Students can be told that much of the information we have about the activities of women in the Revolution has been obtained from letters and journals that have been handed down.

- a) Have students write a letter that one of the heroines of the war may have written telling of her adventures.
- b) Have students investigate everyday life in Colonial times and list how the war may have changed the work and roles of women.
- c) Have students research other women of this period and write a report, draw a story board, or write a poem about their subject. Other women who could be researched include:
 - a) Abigail Adams
 - b) Margaret Corbin
 - c) Deborah Sampson Gannett
 - d) Mary Ludwig Hays (Molly Pitcher)
 - e) Mercy Otis Warren
 - f) Phillis Wheatley
- d) Create a “talk show” with women of the Revolution as guests. Develop questions for the characters so they can explain what they did as well as the ideas of the day.



Mary Hays McCauley, alias Molly Pitcher
Facts on File